

**In the Claims:**

1.       **(Previously Presented)**       A method of multi-enterprise optimization at a buyer computer system, comprising:

accessing a forecasted demand for at least one item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to accessing the forecasted demand, generating one or more proposed flexible trade contracts using the forecasted demand for the item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the proposed flexible trade contracts, communicating each proposed flexible trade contract to a seller computer system to initiate an automatic collaborative negotiation over the proposed flexible trade contract with the seller computer system;

automatically and without user input subsequent to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, receiving at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance in response to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluating the modification to determine whether the modification is acceptable;

automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, accepting the modification if the modification is acceptable; and

subsequent to execution of a flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation, taking one or more actions to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.

2.       **(Original)**       The method of Claim 1, wherein each proposed flexible trade contract is selected from the group consisting of a forward contract, an option contract, and a flexible forward contract.

3.       **(Original)**     The method of Claim 2, wherein each forward contract comprises a quantity of the item that a buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply.

4.       **(Original)**     The method of Claim 3, wherein each forward contract comprises a unit forward contract, and wherein the buyer is obligated to purchase and the seller is obligated to supply a quantity of one unit of the item.

5.       **(Original)**     The method of Claim 2, wherein each option contract comprises an option, the option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:  
a maximum quantity of the item that a seller is obligated to supply;  
a maximum number of item types that the seller is obligated to supply; and  
a maximum number of locations where the item must be provided.

6.       **(Original)**     The method of Claim 5, wherein each option contract comprises a unit option contract, and wherein the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:  
a maximum of one unit of the item;  
a maximum of one item type; and  
a maximum of one location.

7.       **(Original)**     The method of Claim 5, wherein each option contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the option contract during which a buyer must exercise the option.

8. **(Original)** The method of Claim 2, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises:

a total quantity of one or more items that a buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply; and

a plurality of subcontracts each comprising an option, each option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

a range of quantities for one item;

a range of quantities for one item type; and

a range of quantities for one location where the item must be provided.

9. **(Original)** The method of Claim 8, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises a unit flexible forward contract, and wherein the total quantity is one unit and the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

a range of zero to one unit for the item;

a range of zero to one unit for the item type; and

a range of zero to one unit for the location.

10. **(Original)** The method of Claim 8, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the flexible forward contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

11. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, comprising:  
receiving an alternate contract term from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the alternate contract term from the seller computer system, accepting the alternate contract term without user input if the alternate contract term falls within a range of acceptable contract terms; and

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the alternate contract term from the seller computer system, identifying the alternate contract term as requiring user input if the alternate contract term falls outside the range of acceptable contract terms.

12. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising:  
updating the forecasted demand for the item; and  
automatically and without user input subsequent to updating the forecasted demand for the item, exercising an option in the flexible trade contract based on the updated forecasted demand.

13. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising,  
automatically and without user input subsequent to execution of the flexible trade contract, calculating a penalty if a seller fails to comply with a term of the flexible trade contract.

14. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, wherein communicating each proposed flexible trade contract to the seller computer system comprises communicating each proposed flexible trade contract to the seller computer system through an intermediary.

15. **(Previously Presented)** A method of multi-enterprise optimization at a seller computer system, comprising:

receiving, as part of an automatic collaborative negotiation, one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from a buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance, each proposed flexible trade contract reflecting a buyer's forecasted demand for at least one item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving a proposed flexible trade contract from the buyer computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluating the proposed flexible trade contract to determine whether the proposed flexible trade contract is acceptable;

automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation:

if the proposed flexible trade contract is acceptable, accepting the proposed flexible trade contract; and

if the proposed flexible trade contract is not acceptable, generating at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract and communicating the modification to the buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance; and subsequent to execution of a flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation, taking one or more actions to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.

16. **(Original)** The method of Claim 15, wherein each proposed flexible trade contract is selected from the group consisting of a forward contract, an option contract, and a flexible forward contract.

17. **(Original)** The method of Claim 16, wherein each forward contract comprises a quantity of the item that the buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply.

18. **(Original)** The method of Claim 17, wherein each forward contract comprises a unit forward contract, and wherein the buyer is obligated to purchase and the seller is obligated to supply a quantity of one unit of the item.

19. **(Original)** The method of Claim 16, wherein each option contract comprises an option, the option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum quantity of the item that a seller is obligated to supply;
- a maximum number of item types that the seller is obligated to supply; and
- a maximum number of locations where the item must be provided.

20. **(Original)** The method of Claim 19, wherein each option contract comprises a unit option contract, and wherein the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum of one unit of the item;
- a maximum of one item type; and
- a maximum of one location.

21. **(Original)** The method of Claim 19, wherein each option contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the option contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

22. **(Original)** The method of Claim 16, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises:

- a total quantity of one or more items that the buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply; and
- a plurality of subcontracts each comprising an option, each option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:
  - a range of quantities for one item;
  - a range of quantities for one item type; and
  - a range of quantities for one location where the item must be provided.

23. **(Original)** The method of Claim 22, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises a unit flexible forward contract, and wherein the total quantity is one unit and the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a range of zero to one unit for the item;
- a range of zero to one unit for the item type; and
- a range of zero to one unit for the location.

24. **(Original)** The method of Claim 22, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the flexible forward contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

25. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 15, comprising:  
automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the proposed flexible trade contract, generating an alternate contract term; and  
automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the alternate contract term, communicating the alternate contract term to the buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance.

26. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 15, further comprising:  
receiving a request from the buyer computer system to exercise an option in the flexible trade contract; and  
automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the request from the buyer computer system, accepting the buyer's request if the buyer computer system submitted the request within an exercise period and the request does not exceed a term of the flexible trade contract.

27. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 15, further comprising, automatically and without user input subsequent to execution of the flexible trade contract, calculating a penalty if the buyer fails to comply with a term of the flexible trade contract.

28. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 15, wherein receiving one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from the buyer computer system comprises receiving one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from the buyer computer system through an intermediary.

29. **(Previously Presented)** A procurement manager for multi-enterprise optimization, comprising:

a negotiation module operable to:

receive a forecasted demand for at least one item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the forecasted demand, generate one or more proposed flexible trade contracts using the forecasted demand for the item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the proposed flexible trade contracts, communicate each proposed flexible trade contract to a seller computer system to initiate an automatic collaborative negotiation over the proposed flexible trade contract with the seller computer system;

automatically and without user input subsequent to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, receive at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance in response to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluate the modification to determine whether the modification is acceptable; and

automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, accept the modification if the modification is acceptable; and

an execution module operable to execute a flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation to enable one or more actions to be taken to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.



30. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, wherein the negotiation module receives the forecasted demand from a user.

31. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, further comprising a forecast module operable to determine the forecasted demand.

32. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, wherein each proposed flexible trade contract is selected from the group consisting of a forward contract, an option contract, and a flexible forward contract.

33. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 32, wherein each forward contract comprises a quantity of the item that a buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply.

34. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 33, wherein each forward contract comprises a unit forward contract, and wherein the buyer is obligated to purchase and the seller is obligated to supply a quantity of one unit of the item.

35. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 32, wherein each option contract comprises an option, the option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum quantity of the item that a seller is obligated to supply;
- a maximum number of item types that the seller is obligated to supply; and
- a maximum number of locations where the item must be provided.

36. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 35, wherein each option contract comprises a unit option contract, and wherein the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum of one unit of the item;
- a maximum of one item type; and
- a maximum of one location.

37. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 35, wherein each option contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the option contract during which a buyer must exercise the option.

38. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 32, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises:

a total quantity of one or more items that a buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply; and

a plurality of subcontracts each comprising an option, each option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

a range of quantities for one item;

a range of quantities for one item type; and

a range of quantities for one location where the item must be provided.

39. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 38, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises a unit flexible forward contract, and wherein the total quantity is one unit and the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

a range of zero to one unit for the item;

a range of zero to one unit for the item type; and

a range of zero to one unit for the location.

40. **(Original)** The procurement manager of Claim 38, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the flexible forward contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

41. **(Previously Presented)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, wherein the negotiation module is operable to:

receive an alternate contract term from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the alternate contract term from the seller computer system, accept the alternate contract term without user input if the alternate contract term falls within a range of acceptable contract terms; and

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the alternate contract term from the seller computer system, identify the alternate contract term as requiring user input if the alternate contract term falls outside the range of acceptable contract terms.

42. **(Previously Presented)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, further comprising an exercise module operable to:

receive an updated forecasted demand for the item; and

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the updated forecast demand for the item, exercise an option in the flexible trade contract based on the updated forecasted demand.

43. **(Previously Presented)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, further comprising a tracking module operable to, automatically and without user input subsequent to execution of the flexible trade contract, calculate a penalty if a seller fails to comply with a term of the flexible trade contract.

44. **(Previously Presented)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, wherein the negotiation module is operable to communicate the proposed flexible trade contract to the seller computer system through an intermediary.

45. **(Previously Presented)** A supply manager for multi-enterprise optimization, comprising:

a negotiation module operable to:

receive, as part of an automatic collaborative negotiation, one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from a buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance, each proposed flexible trade contract reflecting a buyer's forecasted demand for at least one item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving a proposed flexible trade contract from the buyer computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluate the proposed flexible trade contract to determine whether the proposed flexible trade contract is acceptable;

automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation:

if the proposed flexible trade contract is acceptable, accept the proposed flexible trade contract; and

if the proposed flexible trade contract is not acceptable, generate at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract and communicate the modification to the buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance; and

an execution module operable to execute a flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation to enable one or more actions to be taken to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.

46. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 45, wherein each proposed flexible trade contract is selected from the group consisting of a forward contract, an option contract, and a flexible forward contract.

47. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 46, wherein each forward contract comprises a quantity of the item that the buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply.

48. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 47, wherein each forward contract comprises a unit forward contract, and wherein the buyer is obligated to purchase and the seller is obligated to supply a quantity of one unit of the item.

49. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 46, wherein each option contract comprises an option, the option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum quantity of the item that a seller is obligated to supply;
- a maximum number of item types that the seller is obligated to supply; and
- a maximum number of locations where the item must be provided.

50. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 49, wherein each option contract comprises a unit option contract, and wherein the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum of one unit of the item;
- a maximum of one item type; and
- a maximum of one location.

51. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 49, wherein each option contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the option contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

52. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 46, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises:

a total quantity of one or more items that the buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply; and

a plurality of subcontracts each comprising an option, each option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

- a range of quantities for one item;
- a range of quantities for one item type; and
- a range of quantities for one location where the item must be provided.

53. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 52, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises a unit flexible forward contract, and wherein the total quantity is one unit and the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a range of zero to one unit for the item;
- a range of zero to one unit for the item type; and
- a range of zero to one unit for the location.

54. **(Original)** The supply manager of Claim 52, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the flexible forward contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

55. **(Previously Presented)** The supply manager of Claim 45, wherein the negotiation module is further operable to:

- automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the proposed flexible trade contract, generate an alternate contract term; and
- automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the alternate contract term, communicate the alternate contract term to the buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance.

56. **(Previously Presented)** The supply manager of Claim 45, further comprising a tracking module operable to:

- receive a request from the buyer computer system to exercise an option in the flexible trade contract; and
- automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the request from the buyer computer system, accept the buyer's request if the buyer computer system submitted the request within an exercise period and the request does not exceed a term of the flexible trade contract.

57. **(Previously Presented)** The supply manager of Claim 56, wherein the tracking module is further operable to, automatically and without user input subsequent to execution of the flexible trade contract, calculate a penalty if the buyer fails to comply with a term of the flexible trade contract.

58. **(Previously Presented)** The supply manager of Claim 45, wherein the negotiation module is operable to receive one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from the buyer computer system through an intermediary.

59. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising, as part of the collaborative negotiation, communicating with the seller computer system in a series of rounds in which the buyer computer system and the seller computer system successively propose one or more counter-modifications of the proposed flexible trade contract for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance to create the flexible trade contract.

60. **(Previously Presented)** The method of Claim 15, further comprising, as part of the collaborative negotiation, communicating with the buyer computer system in a series of rounds in which the buyer computer system and the seller computer system successively propose one or more counter-modifications of the proposed flexible trade contract for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance to create the flexible trade contract

61. **(Previously Presented)** The procurement manager of Claim 29, wherein the negotiation module is operable, as part of the collaborative negotiation, to communicate with the seller computer system in a series of rounds in which the negotiation module and the seller computer system further successively propose one or more counter-modifications of the proposed flexible trade contract for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance to create the flexible trade contract.

62. **(Previously Presented)** The supply manager of Claim 45, wherein the negotiation module is operable, as part of the collaborative negotiation, to communicate with the buyer computer system in a series of rounds in which the negotiation module and the buyer computer system further successively propose one or more counter-modifications of the proposed flexible trade contract for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance to create the flexible trade contract.

63. **(Currently Amended)** Software for multi-enterprise optimization at a buyer computer system, the software embodied in computer-readable media and when executed by the computer system operable to:

- access a forecasted demand for at least one item;

- automatically and without user input subsequent to accessing the forecasted demand, generate one or more proposed flexible trade contracts using the forecasted demand for the item;

- automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the proposed flexible trade contracts, communicate each proposed flexible trade contract to a seller computer system to initiate an automatic collaborative negotiation over the proposed flexible trade contract with the seller computer system;

- automatically and without user input subsequent to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, receive at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance in response to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract;

- automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluate the modification to determine whether the modification is acceptable;

- automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, accept the modification if the modification is acceptable; and

- subsequent to execution of a flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation, take one or more actions to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.



64. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 63, wherein each proposed flexible trade contract is selected from the group consisting of a forward contract, an option contract, and a flexible forward contract.

65. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 64, wherein each forward contract comprises a quantity of the item that a buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply.

66. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 65, wherein each forward contract comprises a unit forward contract, and wherein the buyer is obligated to purchase and the seller is obligated to supply a quantity of one unit of the item.

67. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 64, wherein each option contract comprises an option, the option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum quantity of the item that a seller is obligated to supply;
- a maximum number of item types that the seller is obligated to supply; and
- a maximum number of locations where the item must be provided.

68. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 67, wherein each option contract comprises a unit option contract, and wherein the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum of one unit of the item;
- a maximum of one item type; and
- a maximum of one location.

69. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 67, wherein each option contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the option contract during which a buyer must exercise the option.

70. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 64, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises:

a total quantity of one or more items that a buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply; and

a plurality of subcontracts each comprising an option, each option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

a range of quantities for one item;

a range of quantities for one item type; and

a range of quantities for one location where the item must be provided.

71. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 70, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises a unit flexible forward contract, and wherein the total quantity is one unit and the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

a range of zero to one unit for the item;

a range of zero to one unit for the item type; and

a range of zero to one unit for the location.

72. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 70, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the flexible forward contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

73. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 63, operable to:  
receive an alternate contract term from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the alternate contract term from the seller computer system, accept the alternate contract term without user input if the alternate contract term falls within a range of acceptable contract terms; and

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the alternate contract term from the seller computer system, identify the alternate contract term as requiring user input if the alternate contract term falls outside the range of acceptable contract terms.

74. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 63, further operable to:  
update the forecasted demand for the item; and  
automatically and without user input subsequent to updating the forecasted demand for  
the item, exercise an option in the flexible trade contract based on the updated forecasted  
demand.

75. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 63, further operable to,  
automatically and without user input subsequent to execution of the flexible trade contract,  
calculate a penalty if a seller fails to comply with a term of the flexible trade contract.

76. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 63, wherein communicating  
each proposed flexible trade contract to the seller computer system comprises communicating  
each proposed flexible trade contract to the seller computer system through an intermediary.

77. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 63, further operable, as part  
of the collaborative negotiation, to communicate with the seller computer system in a series of  
rounds in which the software and the seller computer system successively propose one or more  
modifications or counter-modifications of the proposed flexible trade contract for automatic  
evaluation and possible acceptance to create the flexible trade contract.

78. **(Currently Amended)** Software for multi-enterprise optimization at a seller computer system, the software embodied in computer-readable media and when executed by the computer system operable to:

receive, as part of an automatic collaborative negotiation, one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from a buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance, each proposed flexible trade contract reflecting a buyer's forecasted demand for at least one item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving a proposed flexible trade contract from the buyer computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluate the proposed flexible trade contract to determine whether the proposed flexible trade contract is acceptable;

automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation:

if the proposed flexible trade contract is acceptable, accept the proposed flexible trade contract ; and

if the proposed flexible trade contract is not acceptable, generate at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract and communicating the modification to the buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance; and

subsequent to execution of a flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation, take one or more actions to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.

79. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 78, wherein each proposed flexible trade contract is selected from the group consisting of a forward contract, an option contract, and a flexible forward contract.

80. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 79, wherein each forward contract comprises a quantity of the item that the buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply.

81. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 80, wherein each forward contract comprises a unit forward contract, and wherein the buyer is obligated to purchase and the seller is obligated to supply a quantity of one unit of the item.

82. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 79, wherein each option contract comprises an option, the option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum quantity of the item that a seller is obligated to supply;
- a maximum number of item types that the seller is obligated to supply; and
- a maximum number of locations where the item must be provided.

83. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 82, wherein each option contract comprises a unit option contract, and wherein the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a maximum of one unit of the item;
- a maximum of one item type; and
- a maximum of one location.

84. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 82, wherein each option contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the option contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

85. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 79, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises:

a total quantity of one or more items that the buyer is obligated to purchase and a seller is obligated to supply; and

a plurality of subcontracts each comprising an option, each option comprising at least one parameter selected from the group consisting of:

- a range of quantities for one item;
- a range of quantities for one item type; and
- a range of quantities for one location where the item must be provided.

86. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 85, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises a unit flexible forward contract, and wherein the total quantity is one unit and the parameter is selected from the group consisting of:

- a range of zero to one unit for the item;
- a range of zero to one unit for the item type; and
- a range of zero to one unit for the location.

87. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 85, wherein each flexible forward contract comprises an exercise period after the execution of the flexible forward contract during which the buyer must exercise the option.

88. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 78, operable to:  
automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the proposed flexible trade contract, generate an alternate contract term; and  
automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the alternate contract term, communicate the alternate contract term to the buyer computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance.

89. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 78, further operable to:  
receive a request from the buyer computer system to exercise an option in the flexible trade contract; and  
automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the request from the buyer computer system, accept the buyer's request if the buyer computer system submitted the request within an exercise period and the request does not exceed a term of the flexible trade contract.

90. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 78, further operable to, automatically and without user input subsequent to execution of the flexible trade contract, calculate a penalty if the buyer fails to comply with a term of the flexible trade contract.

91. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 78, wherein receiving one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from the buyer computer system comprises receiving one or more proposed flexible trade contracts from the buyer computer system through an intermediary.

92. **(Previously Presented)** The software of Claim 79, wherein the software is further operable, as part of the collaborative system negotiation, to communicate with the buyer computer system in a series of rounds in which the software and the buyer computer system successively propose one or more modifications or counter-modifications of the proposed flexible trade contract for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance to create the flexible trade contract.

93. **(Previously Presented)** A system for multi-enterprise optimization at a buyer computer system, comprising:

means for accessing a forecasted demand for at least one item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to accessing the forecasted demand, generating one or more proposed flexible trade contracts using the forecasted demand for the item;

means for, automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the proposed flexible trade contracts, communicating each proposed flexible trade contract to a seller computer system to initiate an automatic collaborative negotiation over the proposed flexible trade contract with the seller computer system;

means for, automatically and without user input subsequent to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, receiving at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance in response to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract;

means for, automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluating the modification to determine whether the modification is acceptable;

means for, automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, accepting the modification if the modification is acceptable; and

means for, subsequent to execution of a flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation, taking one or more actions to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.



94. **(Previously Presented)** A method of multi-enterprise optimization at a buyer computer system, comprising:

accessing a forecasted demand for at least one item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to accessing the forecasted demand, generating one or more proposed flexible trade contracts using the forecasted demand for the item;

automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the proposed flexible trade contracts, communicating each proposed flexible trade contract to a seller computer system to initiate an automatic collaborative negotiation over the proposed flexible trade contract with the seller computer system;

automatically and without user input subsequent to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, receiving at least one modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance in response to communicating the proposed flexible trade contract;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluating the modification to determine whether the first modification is acceptable;

automatically and without user input subsequent to evaluating the modification of the proposed flexible trade contract, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, generating a first counter-modification to the modification if the modification is not acceptable;

automatically and without user input subsequent to generating the first counter-modification to the modification, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, communicating the first counter-modification to the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance;

automatically and without user input subsequent to communicating the first counter-modification, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, receiving at least one second counter-modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance in response to communicating the first counter-modification;

automatically and without user input subsequent to receiving the second counter-modification of the proposed flexible trade contract from the seller computer system, as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, evaluating the second counter-modification to determine whether the second counter-modification is acceptable;

as part of the automatic collaborative negotiation, communicating with the seller computer system in a series of rounds in which the buyer computer system and the seller computer system successively propose one or more further counter-modifications of the proposed flexible trade contract for automatic evaluation and possible acceptance to create a flexible trade contract based on the proposed flexible trade contract; and

subsequent to execution of the flexible trade contract created based on the proposed flexible trade contract as a result of the automatic collaborative negotiation, taking one or more actions to perform under the executed flexible trade contract.